

I am writing to tell you about the greatest boon to my driving through big cities since the highway bypass was invented. As a person from a small town who is mostly unfamiliar with big city radio services, and who is very wary of driving into a big city anywhere near rush hour, for decades I have been driving without adequate traffic information - driving in unawares hoping for good traffic.

The major broadcasters in towns seem to focus on traffic only during rush hour - which I avoid like the plague, so finding timely traffic information has been virtually impossible. Also, local traffic stations tend to talk as if you knew the local names for things and are familiar with every alternative route. You hear things like "the Eden's is backed up due to a stalled vehicle at Diversy. So you might want to take the Dan Ryan if headed out of the Loop towards the Univ of Chicago" (fictitious circumstance). Well, my Rand McNally doesn't show any of those names it uses federal highway names like I-295 and I-55. I am a total loss listening to stations if I'm unfamiliar with the city.

Until now.

On my last trip to Chicago, I was able to skirt a slow-down in St Louis by going through downtown on I-44 rather than by using the usual "safe" bypass of I-270 which was congested. How did I know this? Not because of any local St Louis station (KMOX was busy with a sports talk show and not reporting on any traffic since it was not a peak traffic rush time). I was able to simply tune to the St Louis travel channel on my XM car radio.

Since my car radio is there for car use, and not sports talk, having a 24 hour service to provide me with the information I need as a traveller is invaluable. XM used the same names for roads that are on my map. I tuned in about 50 miles out and far before I would have gotten to any congestion I already knew exactly what way I wanted to travel through the city. It was a lot safer to not have to have the map in hand while speeding along the expressway. Local broadcasters don't make it easy to pass through a city. I think they like you to stay and eat or get a motel while the traffic has you bogged down. But the XM radio information provided me exactly what I needed to safely and quickly traverse a non-ideal traffic situation.

When I got to Chicago, I tuned to the Chicago traffic XM station and received great confidence that my planned route was unimpeded, without having to sort out the local names (such as I heard on the local station interspersed with distracting commercials). I am always confused by such local-based traffic information.

This addition of city based information to the XM band is one of the most unexpectedly wonderful things about my ever-re-justified subscription. They are providing a service that simply does not otherwise exist by helping their customers navigate big city traffic - a type of service that local broadcasters simply have turned into another opportunity for commercials for local services I am not going to use anyway.

We needed this traveller-focused service, and now that it is finally here, I understand that the big media boys want to put a stop to it. This is unfair. If they had provided this service before now, they would not have any competition. If they began to offer this service now, I imagine it would win out by being updated more frequently, but until that can provide what is needed I need XM traffic reports. Please don't let powerful commercial interests outweigh the needs of the citizens.

Please reject the National Association of Broadcasters petition 04-160

Thank you.
fr Mark Gilstrap
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